

Basic Rules of Bible Study



The basic formula for Bible study is to
let the Bible speak for itself
by looking at its own interpretation of its symbols,
pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit,
willingly submit to what we learn,
and keep our focus on Jesus.

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Compare Scripture with Scripture

(Isaiah 28:9-10) *“Whom shall He teach knowledge? And whom shall He make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little”.*

(1 Corinthians 2:13) *“Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual”.*

(2 Timothy 3:16-17) *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”.*

Each of the Bible writers was inspired by the same God. While it is composed of sixty-six books and written by forty-four different authors over a 1,500 year span of time, the Bible is a cohesive whole dealing with one basic theme. What one writer only touches upon, another explains in greater detail.

Sometimes two or more prophets saw the same realities clothed with similar or entirely different symbolism. By comparing all that is written on a given topic, we are far more likely to discover the Bible’s intended meaning and be guarded against false interpretations.

Rightly Divide the Word of God

(2 Timothy 2:15) *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing [handling accurately] the word of truth”.*

It is vital that we let the Bible say what it intends to say and not become reckless in our dissecting of its chapters and verses to concoct private interpretations.

Every passage of Scripture has an immediate context that must not be violated and must be viewed in the broader context of the whole Word of God.

Any interpretation of a text that does not harmonize with the rest of Scripture should be discarded, no matter how tempting or fascinating.

Allow the Bible to Decode Its Own Symbols

(Revelation 17:15) *“And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues”.*

(Daniel 7:23) *“The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth”.*

It is characteristic of Scripture to define its own symbols.

For example: John saw waters as a symbol. The angel later told him that water represents many people of different nations. Daniel saw a series of beasts. The angel told him that the beasts represent kingdoms.

Approach the Bible with Spirit-lead teachability

(1 Corinthians 2:10-14) *“But God hath revealed them [spiritual realities] unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.*

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”.

God Himself is the source of all truth. No human being ever really discovers truth. Rather, God reveals it. Therefore, the attitude with which we come to the Bible matters much.

We need to be more humble than intelligent, more sincere than educated.

While a bright and disciplined mind can be highly beneficial, if that's all we have, truth is out of reach to us.

We need more than human wisdom to truly understand the rich spiritual treasures of the Bible. We need divine guidance. And that means we need to study the Bible with a sense of our own weakness and total dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Be Willing to Obey What You Learn

(John 7:17) *“If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself”.*

(James 1:22) *“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves”.*

The Bible is not intended to merely satisfy curiosity or stimulate us intellectually. Nor is it meant to supply us with ammunition to blast other people. The Word of God aims for individual hearts for the dual purpose of salvation and transformation. Its truths are meant for obedience. Truth beckons us to harmony with the principles it reveals.

Those who study the Scriptures with no intent to obey the Lord are destined for confusion and deception.

And finally, Maintain a Christ-Centred Focus

(John 5:39) *“Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me.”*

The great central theme of the Bible, the subject around which every other in the whole book clusters, is Jesus Christ. Jesus as Creator and Sustainer.

Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Jesus as Father and Friend. All true Bible study is ultimately a quest to know Him, the One in whom our deepest hopes and truest identity find realization. Doctrine, theology, prophecy and history—all are invested with practical significance only when Jesus occupies centre stage.